

# NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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## Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster  
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

## Minutes of Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Meeting February 2, 2007

## Members:

James Allen  
Hon. Vince Anello  
Dr. Ruth Bereson  
Colleen DiPirro  
Tim Doolittle  
Hon. Wright Ellis  
Matthew Enstice  
Andrew Eszak  
Samuel Ferraro  
Hon. Joel Giambra  
Robert Gower  
Hon. Timothy Kennedy  
Hon. Kathy Konst  
David Lacki  
Celeste Lawson  
Gregory Lewis  
Hon. Cynthia Locklear  
Hon. Peter McMahon  
Hon. John Mills  
Hal Morse  
Hon. Jason Murgia  
Jo Nasoff-Finton  
Hon. Sean O'Connor  
John Percy  
Dr. Gary Praetzel  
David Roll  
Hon. William Ross  
Laura St. Pierre Smith  
Christopher Schoepflin  
Hector Titus  
Timothy Wanamaker  
Peter Wendel

**Present:** Burmaster, Weinstein, Anello, Bereson, Ellis, Eszak (proxy), Ferraro, Gower, Lacki, Lawson, McMahon, Morse (proxy), Nasoff-Finton, Praetzel, Ross, Titus, Wendel, Casale, Rath Sanderson, Witul

**Excused:** DiPirro, Doolittle, Enstice, Konst, Lewis, Murgia, O'Connor, Percy, Roll, St. Pierre Smith, Schoepflin

**Absent:** Allen, Giambra, Kennedy, Locklear, Mills, Wanamaker

The meeting was called to order at 8:45 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster and Barry Weinstein, MD. ENRP Member Dr. Gary Praetzel and the Niagara University College of Hospitality and Tourism Management were thanked for hosting the meeting, as were the students who prepared and served the breakfast.

Minutes of the December, 2006 meeting were approved.

New members University at Buffalo Arts Management Program Director Dr. Ruth Bereson and Niagara County Legislature 1<sup>st</sup> District Representative Jason Murgia were welcomed.

## Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale  
Melinda Rath Sanderson  
Lawrence Witul

## Executive Director:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Also welcomed were several guests; representatives of New York State Senator Mary Lou Rath and New York State Assemblyman Robin Schimminger, Niagara University Hospitality and Training Research Center Director Dr. Deborah Curtis and Professor Eddie Friel, Erie County Legislature 10<sup>th</sup> District Representative Michele Iannello, and NU College of Hospitality and Tourism Management student and ENRP volunteer Sara Newman.

The second annual Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Distinguished Service Awards were awarded to Mr. William Pauly and Prof. John Sheffer, II. Pauly was ENRP's first co-chair from Erie County and a former Erie County legislator. As head of the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth, Sheffer was a partner in such projects as the Regional Economic Development

Database (REDD) and the Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS). He was also instrumental in the transition of ENRP into a self sustaining organization through the hiring of the ENRP administrator onto the Institute staff and the housing of our organization at the Institute through his retirement.

Co-Chair Burmaster proposed changing the name of the organization to the Niagara Erie Regional Leadership Coalition, an idea that came up at a meeting of the co-chairs and subcommittee chairs. He explained that ENRP has been around since 1998, but we are getting ready to launch or complete several projects that should gain us wider public exposure. As such, now would be a good time to “rebrand” ourselves and choose a name that would better focus our identity. ENRP Member Wright Ellis asked about a newsletter for the group. ENRP Executive Director Tod A. Kniazuk replied that the newsletter is still a good idea, but that it would be beneficial to wait until we had some concrete wins to report. Staffing also continues to be an issue; our usual “slow times” of August and December were anything but slow due to our contracted work on the Arts and Economic Prosperity project. Ellis added that he liked the idea of adding the word “leadership” to our name, but ENRP Member Jo Nasoff-Finton countered that “leadership” might be a bit presumptuous as one of our strengths has always been partnering rather than presuming leadership. **A unanimous vote was taken to change the name of the organization to the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition.**

Next on the agenda was the sustainability update. Co-Chair Weinstein announced that we have received a \$20,000 grant from New York State Senator Dale Volker. The sustainability committee should meet to decide the best use of the money, as Weinstein does not think it should all be used for recurring expenses. Kniazuk then presented the sustainability update. The beginning balance for the period was \$18.40 and the ending balance was \$2,736.12. The \$4,759.92 in owed 2006 payroll was paid off using the 2006 Niagara County Legislature contribution which arrived in January. We have received 2007 membership contributions from the Amherst Industrial Development Agency (Allen), Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County through contract work (Lawson), Council of Utility Contractors (Titus), Empire State Development/USA Niagara Development Corporation (Doolittle), and the National Electrical Contractors Organization (Roll).

Kniazuk announced a lighter schedule of meetings for 2007. There will now be four general meetings (a reduction of one), each focusing on one of our four topic areas. There will continue to be an expectation of two subcommittee meetings between each general meeting, but that still reduces the average number of subcommittee meetings by two. Therefore, the overall average meeting obligation will be 10 meetings, down from 13 last year. He added that working groups may still be convened more often as needed on specific projects.

Subcommittee Chair David Lacki presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed.

The group then turned to the meeting's main topic, a Focus on Tourism and Culture.

Lacki began with a brief presentation on a major tourism issue – the impending passport requirements for cross border travel, which is “bubbling up” more and more. Canadians flying or cruising out of their country are newly required to have passports, and so many are coming to the United States and departing from here. This has led to an increase in overnight stays. There is already a backlog in Canadian passport applications, and only about 30 percent of US and Canadian residents currently have passports. The Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau is reminding potential tourists that no passport is required, and has put that on their website. The US government, however, is still planning to change the law and require passports next January. Regional Coalition Member Vince Anello added that cross border mayors are also working on this issue and have lobbied both Washington and Ottawa. Praetzel noted that the Bi-National Tourism Alliance Conference on March 4-6 will also be addressing this. Lacki concluded that the people who will be most affected by the passport requirements will be last minute travelers and infrequent travelers.

Kniazuk presented the Regional Coalition's current Tourism & Culture efforts, the Arts and Economic Prosperity III national report and The Big Easy in Buffalo music education and concert series. The report's data collection has been completed and given to Americans for the Arts for analysis and inclusion in their national report. We will also receive a report specifically for the Erie and Niagara County region. The announcement of the findings on economic impact of the culturals in the two counties will take place in early June. This project is a collaboration between the Regional Coalition, the Arts

Council in Buffalo & Erie County, Americans for the Arts, and AmeriCorps.

The Big Easy in Buffalo series is being funded through a \$90,000 grant from the New York State Music Fund. The project is a partnership between the Regional Coalition, the Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau Foundation, and Music Is Art. Between April 2007 and February 2008 a series of nine concerts featuring at least 12 bands from New Orleans and Louisiana will take place. Proceeds from the concerts will be used to donate instruments to the Buffalo and Niagara Falls public schools. During the day of each show the bands will also take place in music education programs in local schools. Kniazuk concluded that both of these projects are not only excellent on their own merits, but offer the opportunity for the Coalition to gain valuable public exposure.

Praetzel presented an overview of the Niagara University College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, which offered the world's first bachelor's degree in tourism management. The college is a member of the Leading Hotel Schools of the World – only the top ten programs across the globe are members. They are the fastest growing hospitality and tourism program in the nation; from 150 students in 1999 to 415 currently. The college's career fair is unmatched, with 40 companies and 15 corporate recruiters scheduled for this year (many of them alumni of the program themselves). The placement rate out of the program is 100 percent.

Dr. Curtis talked about the NU Hospitality and Training Research Center, which is affiliated with the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management. The Center was started five years ago and has done training at such places as Trump Atlantic City, Dubai, and the number one ranked hotel in the world located in Italy. They are currently working on a new hotel project in Lewiston called Barton Hill. The Center is also involved with the Impacting Arts and Culture effort (formerly the Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative). They are partnering with the Bi-National Tourism Alliance on research and strategies for the project as well as working on customer service training and cultural concierge training. As part of this initiative Eddie Friel will be working with the Center for the next three years.

The University at Buffalo was up next, through the new Arts Management Program and its director Dr. Bereson. The program was formed in August 2006 and is a two year, 39 credit master's

program. They are working in partnership with the schools of management and law, as arts managers have to understand legal and managerial issues. The program presents an international speaker series and a publication entitled "Why Manage the Arts." Over the summer the students will be studying in France. The goal of the program is to have 30 students per two year program, and to work toward developing the country's first doctoral program in arts management.

Co-Chair Burmaster introduced our keynote speaker, Professor Eddie Friel. Friel is the former head of Glasgow tourism and is currently in residence at NU. Burmaster concluded the introduction by saying we are honored to have him as our guest.

Friel began by informing us that his proper title is "Expert in Residence." He then informed us that it's actually the visa category under which he's here. Friel proceeded to set the context for his work here by stressing the importance of quality of place and the need to find our competitive advantage. This region's advantages are history, heritage, and culture. He also noted that while we define ourselves by geographic boundaries, markets create their own boundaries and capital knows no boundaries.

In the new economy, Friel continued, highly educated people are needed. The nature of work has changed from manual to knowledge, and that can be a challenge for places like ours that have a strong industrial past and now need to transition to the new economy.

The question, then, is how do you engage a population without qualifications and education in an economy that demands just that? In the long term the population needs to be educated for the advanced new positions, but in the short term a bridge is needed to enter the new economy – tourism, according to Friel, can be that short term job creator. Simply put, tourism is a point of entry to the new economy and to wealth creation.

The place is here, but we are charged with creating customers for the place. Our questions are what is the product and how do we take it to market? Friel spoke of "single unit accountability" or, who is responsible? We need to agree on strategy, identify the needed skills, set up the delivery mechanisms and who is responsible for each of them, then do our job and do not get in the way of the others carrying out theirs.

Friel detailed several aspects of tourism and attracting visitors. You must create a positive perception of the destination in markets you want to attract. The potential visitor will ask, Why should I come there? You must give them a compelling reason. You also have to answer their questions, How do I get there, and where do I stay? As we answer these questions, we must ask ourselves if we are capable of delivering on the promises we make to those visitors, and if we have skilled and qualified people delivering on those promises.

Attention was then turned to cultural tourism. The role of the arts manager is to create and expand the audience for their art form, not to create tourists. Tourism agencies need to work to attract those audiences for the arts agencies. Arts agencies are also needed for the creation of jobs and for the attraction of workers based on quality of place. In business to create wealth is to increase the quality of life for your residents. If it's a good place to live and work, chances are it's also a good place to visit.

Friel's message to us is that we all need to learn how to win for Buffalo-Niagara, regardless of our individual organizations or borders. We need to be one team. The customer does not recognize our organizations or borders, and we all win if we work together after agreeing on a common strategy on how to move forward.

The co-chairs thanked Friel for his insightful and provocative thoughts.

There was no old or new business.

The next general meeting date was set for Friday, May 11 at 8:30 a.m. at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (thanks to Jo Nasoff-Finton). The Co-Chairs thanked the group, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk  
May 4, 2007